



# Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

No 387 9 December 2015 30p/80p

[www.workersliberty.org](http://www.workersliberty.org)

## NHS FACES WINTER CRISIS



**Labour must campaign to reverse cuts**

**Join Labour! Join Young Labour!**



## What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production. Society is shaped by the capitalists' relentless drive to increase their wealth. Capitalism causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class has one weapon: solidarity.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty aims to build solidarity through struggle so that the working class can overthrow capitalism. We want socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for the labour movement to break with "social partnership" and assert working-class interests militantly against the bosses.

Our priority is to work in the workplaces and trade unions, supporting workers' struggles, producing workplace bulletins, helping organise rank-and-file groups.

We are also active among students and in many campaigns and alliances.

### We stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.
- If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!

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# Momentum NHS launches

By Sacha Ismail

A group of Labour Party NHS activists met after the People's Assembly and Save Lewisham Hospital conferences on 5 December to discuss the launch of Momentum NHS — a new campaign to mobilise the labour movement in campaigning to save the NHS.

New, but not completely new, because Momentum NHS is a continuation and transformation of a Labour NHS campaign which ran from mid-2012 to early 2015. That campaign got motions submitted to Labour Party conferences and organised lobbies at them, as part of building links between party, trade union and health activists to demand better, clearer poli-

cies from Labour. It also organised support among NHS activists for Jeremy Corbyn's leadership campaign.

Corbyn's election has blown several big holes in the barriers to getting Labour campaigning on this. However, things are definitely not "sorted"! Post-Andy Burnham, Labour's policies on the health service are chronically unclear, and the party has so let opportunities to campaign on the issue go by.

**Momentum NHS intends to change that! We call on all Labour Party members, trade unionists and health campaigners who want to see Labour leading a movement to save the NHS to get in touch and get involved.**



• [momentumnhs@gmail.com](mailto:momentumnhs@gmail.com)  
Facebook: Momentum NHS

• For the old campaign going back to 2012, see [labournhslobby.wordpress.com](http://labournhslobby.wordpress.com)

## Trump: giving voice to increasing racism

By Kelly Rogers

Donald Trump has sparked outrage after he called for a "total and complete" ban on Muslims entering the US.

Trump is leading the poll, to be the Republican Party's presidential candidate.

He called for "a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the US, until our country's representatives can figure out what the hell is going on".

Trump has garnered a lot of criticism both from the public, and from some prominent Republicans, including his opponents Jeb Bush, who called Trump "unhinged", and John Kasich, who said his statement was "just more of the outrageous divisiveness that characterises his every breath". Lindsey Graham,



A protestor at a Trump rally in Los Angeles

also running for Republican presidential candidate, has said his remarks were "out-right dangerous".

Bush, Kasich and Graham, share low ratings in the polls, with Bush, the highest ranked of the three, garnering less than 4% in the latest. Republican candidates ranking higher have responded weakly, a fact

probably to do with Trump getting a boost in the polls as a result of his demagogic remarks.

They take place in a context of heightened security, xenophobia, and anti-Muslim racism, following the attacks in Paris, and an attack by a Muslim couple in San Bernardino, in which they killed 14 people. Trump also

said, "there is a great hatred toward Americans by large segments of the Muslim population".

We must argue against terrorist attacks being used to justify reactionary, anti-immigrant rhetoric, or heightened surveillance by the state. This applies, currently, to the state of emergency and raids in France, as well as statements like Trump's from the political establishment in the US.

**He stated his prejudice particularly boldly, but his remarks hold up a mirror, also, to the attitudes held by many in Britain, to the headlines on the front of some of our mainstream newspapers, and "war on terror" policies coming from government.**

## Don't mourn, organise!

A Workers' Liberty meeting and social event celebrating the life and struggles of Joe Hill, who was murdered by the bosses a hundred years ago. Our evening will start with documentary clips and readings about Joe Hill, the IWW and US labour struggle in the years leading up to the First World War. Then over drinks and food we will listen to his songs and discuss.

**Saturday 19 December, 6.30pm, The Union Tavern, 52 Lloyd Baker Street, WC1X 9AA**  
[bit.ly/joehillsocial](http://bit.ly/joehillsocial)





# Worse cuts for councils

By Gerry Bates

**George Osborne's 25 November Spending Review unleashed another round of extreme cuts in local government. The Tory chair of the Local Government Association said:**

"Even if councils stop filling in potholes, maintaining parks, closed all children's centres, libraries, museums, leisure centres and turned off every street light, they will not have saved enough money to plug the financial black hole they face by 2020.

"These local services which people cherish will have to be drastically scaled back or lost altogether as councils are increasingly forced to do more with less and protect life and death services, such as caring for the elderly and protecting children."

The most wide reaching change is the end of the

block grant to local authorities, money redistributed by central government to local authorities for general rather than defined purposes.

The alternative set out in the review is for councils to keep 100% of their income from business rates (property taxes currently not only set, but also redistributed, by central government) and to be able to raise council tax by 2% to subsidise social care (at present councils suffer severe penalties if they raise council tax).

## GRANTS

**By 2020 the block grant, worth £18bn last year, will have been completely abolished.**

According to local authority leaders, only £11.5bn will come in from business rates to compensate. It is a huge shortfall, and one which will disproportionately affect the north of



Protestors outside Salford's council meeting in February

England, where business rates are lower.

Lower income areas also have a far higher proportion of band A properties on which the lowest rate of council tax is paid.

## HOUSING

**The Government's contribution to new housing is almost solely based on private ownership.**

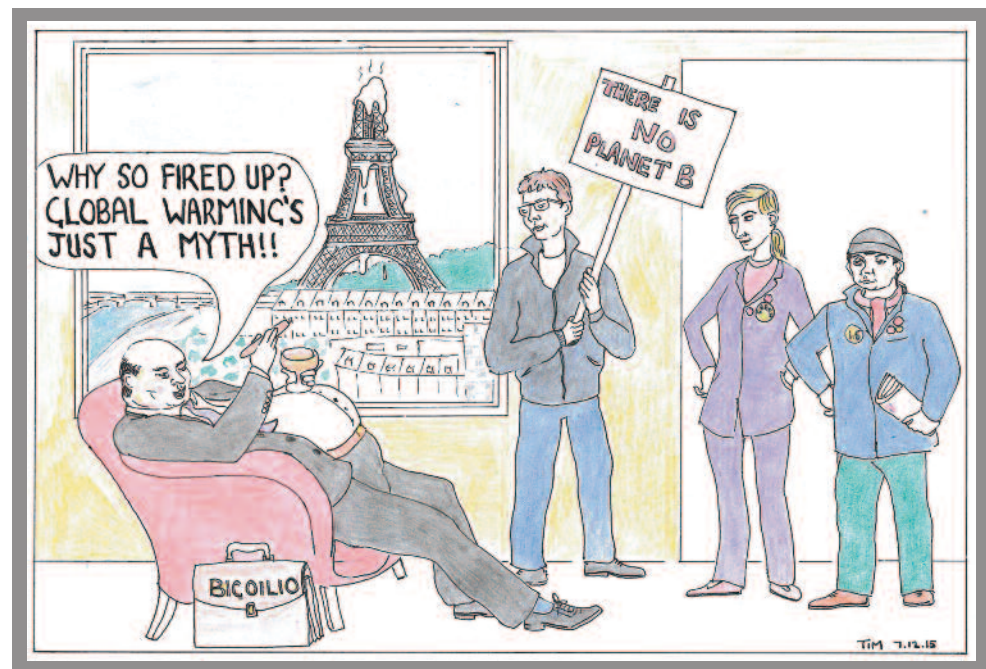
Housing associations, local authorities and private house builders will be expected to make 135,000 dwellings eligible for the Government's "Help to Buy" ownership schemes. Five housing associations will now be required to help their tenants buy out their properties, in an extension of Thatcher's Right to Buy scheme for council housing.

The shift to business rate revenue is calculated to make councils compete against each other to attract business investment.

Osborne will only allow areas that accept his plans for devolution and an elected mayor to raise business rates. The extra revenue raised can then only be used for infrastructure, not for delivery of services.

Councils are likely to find their budgets cover only the services they have to supply by law. Even these services will be unsustainable if cuts continue.

**The "dented shield" policy — Labour councils implementing the Tory cuts, but supposedly more softly — will make less and less sense.**



# Court victory for council estate

By Mike Krane

**On 24 November 2015, the High Court ruled in favour of the residents of the Cressingham Gardens Estate in Lambeth.**

The court found the council offered insufficient proof that refurbishment rather than demolition would be too expensive, and forcing the council to reopen the consultation process.

Lambeth Council has say-

ing since 2012 that it doesn't have the money to make basic repairs and it would be cheaper to "redevelop" the estate's 300 homes.

This would mean residents are turfed out, luxury apartments built in their place, half of them not even lived in but used as financial investments, a handful of so-called affordable flats thrown in sops.

Residents have campaigned consistently. They revealed that the council

was inflating the supposedly unaffordable cost of repairs to the estate by having underinvested in the repairs budget in the first place. Lobbies of the council and demonstrations followed, fundraiser gigs were organised.

The council offered only a choice between partial or full demolition of the estate. So resident Eva Bokrossov challenged the council in the High Court.

It has been a well-fought

battle. The war is far from over. The council will likely try again to redevelop the estate after the new consultation. Five others in the borough are targeted for "regeneration".

**Local housing campaigns need to link up and make national demands: for rent caps, more council housing, and for councils to be able to seize empty properties and use them.**

# Councillors must fight cuts

By Kieran Miles

**I sat in on a very bleak meeting of the cabinet of the Labour council in Lambeth, south London, on Monday 7 December.**

The council has already cut £79.5 million over the last five years. It will now make a further £35 million in cuts in 2015/16, another £37 million in 2016/17, and is currently estimating cuts for 2018/19 at anything from £49 to £75 million.

That's a total drop in funding of 50% over 2010-18.

Lambeth also has the lowest reserves among the inner London boroughs. One of the councillors said that 500 council staff have been sacked or have taken voluntary redundancy because of local government cuts over the last five years.

Now the council is looking at another 500 in the short term, and another 1000 in the medium term. The big campaign — demonstrations, lobbies, petitions, wildcat strikes — over plans to close two libraries and turn three into gyms has been over just £800,000 of the total £147 million cuts in the decade.

The number one reason for homelessness in Lambeth is eviction. Evictions because of benefits cuts, falling wages, the bedroom tax, soaring rents, lack of council housing to apply for. There are 1800 homeless families in temporary accommodation in Lambeth, including some 5000 children. And that's just people registered with the council — there are probably double or triple that living on friends' sofas, in unofficial shelters (beds in sheds), on the streets, or packed six to a room.

Dealing with homelessness is not one of the council's statutory requirements, and therefore not protected. Lambeth is cutting its homelessness budget by tens of millions of pounds. People will die waiting to be housed.

Even then, by 2020, the council looks like it will fail to meet even basic statutory requirements

What of the fightback? There are still some community anti-cuts groups, fighting alongside local trade union members in workplace-by-workplace disputes. While the new Labour leadership is fighting the PLP, Momentum in organising the left in wards and CLPs. There are nascent rank-and-file projects in the unions that have fighting strategies to win national disputes on pay and pensions — LANAC in the NUT, for example. But there is a weak link in the chain: councillors.

Labour councils have passed on the cuts in near-complete silence. The Councillors Against Cuts project attracted only a dozen councillors, most of whom were expelled from the Labour Party.

Councillors attempt to rationalise. They claim that they have "no choice". If you don't cut parks, then you must cut funding for disabled children. Privatisation is better than no service at all.

They are too timid even to speak of local council resistance, whether of the failed attempts — Liverpool and Lambeth in the 80s — or the successful ones — Clay Cross in 1972, and famously, Poplar in 1921, which forced the eventual abolition of the Poor Law Unions which had existed for centuries.

Councillors do have a choice. Setting a needs budget, or a cuts budget, is a political choice. In many ways, it is easier to set a needs budget now than before. Councillors can't be jailed or surcharged, for example. And the standard retort, that central government will just send in commissioners to make the cuts, assumes a passivity in response. If councillors made a needs budget, and then used their elected positions to lead a campaign by mass demonstrations, community occupations, a sustained program of official and unofficial strikes, against imposed commissioners, then central government would be forced into making concessions.

No more excuses from cowardly Labour councillors! As George Lansbury put it in 1921, "it is better to break the law than break the poor".

**Momentum should be agitating for a national strategy from Corbyn HQ of instructing councillors to defy cuts now.**



# “Universities should be bastions of freedom of thought”

On Monday 30 November a meeting at Goldsmiths University, London, with the Iranian-born secular, ex-Muslim, feminist and socialist activist Maryam Namazie was seriously disrupted by individuals from the University's Islamic Society (Isoc). They accused Namazie of Islamophobia and were trying to “no-platform” her.

On the day before the meeting the president of ISoc called for the hosts, the Atheist, Secularist and Humanist Society (ASHsoc) to stop the meeting. The Feminist Society and LGBTQ Society publicly backed that stance as Namazie's presence on campus violated the Student Union's Safer Spaces policy. The meeting went ahead, ending with an interesting dialogue between Namazie and Muslim women students. Namazie, unsurprisingly to anyone acquainted with her real views, went to great lengths to express her opposition to racist attacks on Muslims, migrants and others.

The following statement (extracts printed here) from ASHSoc is a thoughtful and convincing response to this “controversy”.

*Cathy Nugent*

**...Whilst “safe spaces” are legitimate options for those who have been victimised and discriminated against, universities by their very definition cannot be “safe spaces”.**

Few would disagree that, if anywhere, universities should be bastions of freedom of thought and ideas, but for this to hold any meaning whatsoever, they must be bastions for the freedom of all ideas — regardless of how popular they may be or whether they are deemed “controversial” or even offensive by some.

Offence, may act as an impetus for argument, but it is not, in and of itself, an argument, nor grounds for suppression. It is essential to be able to hear ideas that make us uncomfortable; this is the essence of tolerance. There should be no “safe spaces” for ideas to go unchallenged.

The claims often made against Maryam and other speakers alike seem to insist that because there is a climate of hatred towards Muslims from the far-right, we should not allow what some consider offensive criticism of Islam as a religious



**Maryam Namazie**

ideology, like any other.

In the incident at Goldsmiths, the Feminist and LGBTQI+ societies shared anti-free speech sentiments by making statements of solidarity with the Isoc leadership's position and as such, seemed to tacitly condone their actions. This is a response rooted in a convoluted and solipsistic notion of regressive identity politics that wrongly conflates criticisms of Islam as an ideology or Islamism as a political movement, with inciting hatred towards Muslims.

It fails to see the dissent within minority communities and also implicitly assumes that a diverse body of people who follow the Islamic faith are all offended or intolerant of Maryam's opinions.

As was evident in the meeting itself, some of the women members of Isoc did not condone the intimidating behaviour of the male members; some Muslims in the audience apologised to Maryam for their behaviour, making it clear that not all Muslims agree with this assumption. Also, rather than having any real concern for safe spaces, the ISoc leadership used this policy in order to make the event unsafe for all those who disagreed with them.

Such mischaracterisations have led to the abuse of “safe space” policies in the past and a culture of suppression at the

university towards views that are not in line with the student union or, as in this case, other politically oriented societies. This is a gross subversion. What is more important however, is that this incident is not isolated, nor is the response.

What must be more clearly stressed is that, whilst non-violent protest and challenging ideas should be actively encouraged at universities, what cannot be tolerated is making an attempt to stop speakers from speaking entirely, unless they are directly inciting violence. Whether this be through vague “blasphemy laws” with little to no basis in established law, which exist in numerous student union external speaker policies, or whether it be through “safe space” policies, which often have similar rules open to abuse and are sometimes used for intimidation, as in this case...

Student Unions' responses have typically suggested that the issue lies in the misuse of these policies by individuals. Clearly, because this is a recurrent theme at universities, this is a structural problem which enables this to keep occurring. It is the policies themselves that need to be amended so as to ensure this does not continue to happen. Whilst our Student Union has not officially responded yet... we fear that a similar dismissive response will occur with no policy changes.

In the same way that we cannot champion free expression for some, but not others, we cannot champion the rights of those who believe and not champion the rights of those who choose not to believe. Freedom of expression for all, including non-believers, is a basic human right and one that universities of all places must unequivocally defend.

We feel that the current policy prescriptions the NUS espouse, and which many student unions have adopted as a result, have consistently been shown to be at least ineffective and in many cases, actively suppressive of freedom of expression and we strongly urge the NUS, and Goldsmiths Student Union, to reform their policies.

**As with similar events... public outcry has had a strong influence on the response of student unions, therefore, we are making this statement public, but will also be pursuing formal channels of complaint to the NUS and we encourage them to respond in regards to further action.**

• Full statement: <http://chn.ge/1NTCMHB>

## Letters



## Yes, nationalise the land

**“There is a great danger that nationalisation would create a lumbering bureaucratic giant which would be of little use to anyone”, writes John Cunningham (*Solidarity* 384), to criticise Bruce Robinson's call for the nationalisation of land (*Solidarity* 381).**

John argues instead for leaving land in the owners' hands and taxing its rental value.

It's an odd argument for a socialist. We want public ownership and large-level democratic planning of all major economic resources, not just land.

This would create “giant” economic concentrations, true. But capitalism, in its giant corporations, has already developed techniques to plan and coordinate on a very large scale.

Socialism will do it better because it will allow for free and democratic flows of information and criticism, and because our planning will be for the common good and sustainability, rather than a race for the profit of a few.

In the 19th century, even many bourgeois economists, following arguments from James Mill and David Ricardo, advocated nationalisation of land: Leon Walras and Philip Wicksteed, for example. We should not fall behind them.

*Martin Thomas, Islington*

## Whip neither her nor there

**I don't agree with *Solidarity* (386) that Labour's free vote on the bombing issue was a “big mistake”.**

Cameron would have gone ahead either way once he felt

confident that enough Labour MPs would vote with him. In principle of course MPs should follow party policy but I doubt a whip would have made much difference.

These MPs can be challenged at CLP level once they've put their head over the parapet. This will isolate them inside the party.

**As the statement also said, Corbyn is too weak in the PLP to impose his line now, but I doubt it will do much harm in the longer run.**

*Ray Browning, Manchester*

## Free vote serious mistake

**I think it is a serious mistake for Labour not to have used the whip. First it allowed the Tories a victory on bombing Syria. They were given a free run.**

That's bad because it is bad for Syria. And if Corbyn had insisted on using the whip, it is not clear that the Tories would have risked taking it to a vote in the Commons, because the number of Labour rebels would have been reduced, perhaps substantially.

And it is bad because of the situation in the Party. Corbyn needed to bang the table, rally his people and his support in the party. He needed to state that rebels were going against a conference decision and the big majority of members, and siding with the Tories. He needed to act like he understands there's a big fight coming and this is the first phase of it.

**The right in the PLP will gain confidence, and now they have a precedent: next time they want to vote for Tory crap they'll be able to demand a free vote.**

*Dan Katz, London*

## Organise the left

**One thing that needs to be factored in, and addressed, is the state of the “Labour left”.**

A lot of people who voted for Corbyn have not joined the

Party, a lot of the people who have joined the Party are not (yet) active in it, and the “Labour left”, being the “Labour left”, is pretty disorganised.

Whatever one thinks of Corbyn's decision not to whip, there is the bigger question of organising the left so that it is organisationally and politically coherent enough to assert real control in the Party. A lot of CLPs — and not just CLPs — are still controlled by the right.

Some have almost posed the issue as: Jeremy is the good guy, the Shadow Cabinet are the bad guys, and that's the only context in which he has to operate.

**Consequently, the role of the “Labour left” is reduced to cheering on Jeremy, and expressing commiserations about his plight of being surrounded by bad people.**

*Dale Street, Glasgow*

## The dominant thinking

**While doing some background reading, in an attempt to make sense of Hilary Benn's demagogic speech in the House of Commons (for example his ludicrous use of “internationalism” or his bizarre — and obscene — evocation of the International Brigades), I came across the following from the, alas, deceased Palestinian activist and author, Edward Said.**

He was writing in April 2003 about the earlier Iraq invasion, so the parallels with the present situation are not exact. Nevertheless, I think he admirably captures the spirit — if not the letter — of the current dominant thinking.

“This is the most reckless war in modern times. It is all about imperial arrogance unschooled in worldliness, unfettered either by competence or experience, undeterred by history or human complexity, unrepentant in its violence and the cruelty of its technology.

**“What winning, or for that matter losing, such a war will ultimately entail is unthinkable.”**

*Len Glover*





# Campaign to reverse NHS cuts!

**From 11 December, figures for A&E waiting times, ambulance delays outside hospitals, last-minute cancellations of operations and the number of patients left on trolleys for longer than four hours will be removed from official updates on the condition of the NHS.**

The updates will be released only monthly, rather than every week as they have been in the past, and the Government has redefined “winter” to be a month shorter and thus not directly comparable with previous years.

Thus the Tories hope to reduce the media headlines about crisis in the NHS, though they can’t reduce the crisis itself. Headline waiting times standards for cancer and in emergency departments are now missed routinely; the target minimum wait for diagnostic tests has not been met for the past 18 months; the now-abandoned elective waiting time target was missed in 14 of the past 18 months.

Hospitals had already “overspent” by £1.6 billion halfway through the financial year. 80% of hospitals face deficits of up to £100 million each this year. NHS bosses have reacted by telling hospitals that they no longer have to ensure at least one nurse for every eight patients.

The campaign group Health Emergency says that it is “urgent for Labour’s new front bench to get up to speed with the situation and start hammering the Tories over their despicable record on the NHS and the crisis they have created.

“We need a united campaign of local campaigners, health unions and Labour Party making maximum protest and challenging every local cutback and closures.

“We need to exploit divisions in the enemy. We must take advantage of the fact that the Tory bar on recruitment of nurses from outside the EU has been challenged by Simon Stevens and NHS managers. We need to use the opposition of NHS employers to the brutal anti-union laws now being forced through...

“Labour’s new leadership... need to seek out good expert analysis and advice, reach out to trade unions and local campaigners, and raise a coordinated challenge in a much more professional way than has been done so far. Any Blairites who get out of line on this must be slapped down publicly.

## UNSUSTAINABLE

**“Labour should ditch the ill-conceived Efford Bill, and sign up to the NHS Reinstatement Bill drafted by Allyson Pollock and Peter Roderick, which aims to sweep away the costly and divisive apparatus of the competitive market in health care.**

“It’s time to put the Tories to the sword over their ruinously expensive, chaotic and disastrous ‘reforms’ that have brought the NHS to its knees while Osborne freeze drives it to bankruptcy.

“It’s not the NHS that is unsustainable, for all the Tories tell us: it’s the Tory policies on the NHS which are unsustainable — and Jeremy Corbyn’s team need to be making that point long and loud”.

The “cash boost” for the NHS in Chancellor George Os-

borne’s 25 November Spending Review still leaves the NHS budget, in the words of the King’s Fund research group, “squeezed as never before”. The relative cuts in the NHS since 2010 are already much bigger than in Thatcher’s 1980s.

The NHS cuts are already killing. Recently-released figures show that in the relatively mild winter of 2014-5 there were an estimated 36,300 “excess” winter deaths among over-75s (compared to monthly deaths in the rest of the year), and 7,700 among under-75s. The long-term trend has been for “excess” winter deaths to decrease. In 2014-5 they increased. 2015-6 is likely to be a stormier and colder winter.

The King’s Fund, a conservative body with low expectations, thought the NHS did relatively well in the Spending Review. But it saw that “the NHS and social care are now set for a decade-long funding squeeze which will see the largest sustained falls in spending as a share of GDP on both services in modern times”.

The NHS faces a “huge challenge” imposed by the Government “of finding £22 billion in efficiency savings by 2020-21”. In fact Government measures tend to decrease NHS “efficiency” by cutting the public health budget and funding for social care, so preventive care suffers and hospital beds are “blocked” by patients who would be better cared for outside hospital but for whom there is no care available outside,

“It is clear that a large chunk of the additional funding for the NHS has been found through substantial cuts to other Department of Health budgets. Cutting the public health budget is a false economy... New powers to increase Council Tax will provide some financial flexibility for councils but will disadvantage deprived areas with the highest needs for publicly funded care. These measures... are not a substitute for sustainable funding”.

The junior hospital doctors have forced the Tories to step back on their plans to worsen their conditions, but so far only temporarily.

**As Jeremy Corbyn said on 6 December: “We’ve a crisis in A&E, hospital wards understaffed and people waiting longer and longer — and the Tory response is to try and stop people finding out. These deeply cynical attempts to hide the truth reveal one thing: the Tories are failing patients”.**

## Junior doctors: keep up the pressure!

**Prospects for negotiators for junior doctors in renewed talks with the Department of Health/NHS Employers now look stronger .**

This is down to the hard work of junior doctors, their protests, and a strong 98% vote for strike action.

The government is now saying it will maintain some form of financial safeguard under any new contract and offering other concessions. But there is still a lot to be won, and one of the clearest sticking points is around unsocial hours.

Junior doctors believe it is important that the Treasury are part of negotiations, so that a deal will stick. At the same time no one will want the government to make cuts elsewhere in order to make this issue go away. In the autumn statement we saw cuts to nursing bursaries, junior doctors’ training and public health. These cuts also need to

be fought against.

In agreeing to suspend the strikes, the British Medical Association got a deal from the government not to invoke the law which states the first industrial action under a ballot must be taken within 27 days of the ballot ending. The BMA have been allowed to extend their ballot’s mandate until 13 January.

Realistically this means that the BMA Junior Doctors’ Executive must decide before Christmas whether or not negotiations are progressing meaningfully. It’s a short time frame.

**Junior doctors should continue to build for strikes in the future and keep the pressure up on both the government and on the BMA. A victory on this dispute will help build the fight to defend the NHS.**

### Xmas/New Year break

**Solidarity 387 will be sent out to subscribers on Wednesday 9 December. The paper will then take a break during the holiday period, when labour movement activity is reduced, and Solidarity 388 will be out on Wednesday 6 January.**



# Anti-government protests in Seoul

By Nolan Grunski

**On Saturday 14 November, protestors took to the streets of Seoul for the largest demonstration in at least seven years.**

Estimates of the number of protestors present range from 60,000 to 130,000, with over 500 injured by water cannons, liquified tear gas, and pepper spray, 51 detained by police, and one demonstrator, farmer Paek Nam-ki, left in critical condition. Protesters were also sprayed with blue paint, so they could be identified for later arrest.

Paek was named as a “professional protester” by Choi Hyun-jun, president of Unification Future Alliance, who also alleged the protestors were “pro-north, anti-state, and anti-liberal democracy”.

Protestors also marched through Seoul on Saturday 5 December, but in much lower number than on 14 November despite courts refusing to grant the government an injunction banning the protest.

The anti-government demonstrations specifically protested several issues, including Park Geun-hye’s recent decision to replace privately-published school history textbooks with a uniform, government-issued text, changes to laws, destructive rice imports, and quickly increasing youth unemployment. groups said the changes to the laws would benefit only the country’s powerful family-controlled conglomerates, known as chaebol, by making it easier to fire workers.

## STUDENTS

**Student protesters said that the new textbook, to be issued by the government by 2017, would whitewash or even glorify the legacy of President Park Geun-hye’s father, former dictator Park Chung-hee, who was accused of collaborating with Japanese colonial forces in the early 20th century, and was assassinated in 1979.**

In addition, it would obscure the historical relationship with North Korea, and inaccurately portray their “juche” philosophy. The government insists it is merely “correcting” the nation’s history.

During a news conference, Han Sang-gyun, the leader of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), pointed to a widening gap between the rich and the poor in South Korea, saying that the chaebol were “wallowing in cash” while an increasing number of workers were forced to work on poorly paid temporary contracts. Plainclothes police officers tried to detain Han under a court warrant that allowed them to arrest him for organising illegal protests in the past. Han escaped into a nearby building and later showed up at the main rally, calling on the crowd to march on the Blue House, “the heart of an unjust government.”

The KCTU, with a diverse membership spanning trucking, construction, autoworkers and public teachers, organised the rally as the crowd converged in central Seoul and tried to march towards the presidential Blue House. They



The government attempted to ban protestors from wearing masks

were demanding Park step down from her position as president.

The KCTU headquarters were raided by riot police on December 22, 2013. Hundreds were injured, and six senior KCTU leaders were arrested for supporting a national railway strike which the government declared illegal.

The International Trade Union Confederation and the International Transport Workers’ Federation commented on the matter by saying, “The government of South Korea and its anti-union behaviour is again in the spotlight of the international community. Its actions run contrary to its obligations to the ILO... Further, the government is failing to fulfill its original commitment to the OECD, upon accession, to respect international labour standards.”

## WORKERS’ RIGHTS

**In 2014, the International Trade Union Confederation ranked South Korea as among the world’s worst countries for worker rights.**

It was listed alongside China, Cambodia, Nigeria, and Bangladesh as a place where workers “are systematically exposed to unfair dismissals, intimidation, arrests and violence often leading to serious injuries and death.”

In response to the 14 November protests, KCTU offices were raided once again, as well as those of other groups. A total of 12 offices of eight groups were raided by the police on the same day.

“The groups are suspected of leading the illegal, violent protest, and we will secure evidence to find those who orchestrated them,” an officer from Seoul Metropolitan Police Agency says.

Park Geun-hye has said that protests consist of “terrorist elements” and has called for a ban on wearing masks, which was determined unconstitutional by an earlier court ruling. Park said, “In particular, masks in protests should not be tolerated. Isn’t that what the IS is doing these days, with their faces hidden like that?”

Many Korean activists were further shocked when a senior official in Park’s ruling Saenuri Party pointed to the routine use of force by police in America to justify Seoul’s crackdown on dissent. “In the United States, the police use their firearms to kill people, and in 80 percent to 90 percent of these cases, they’re ruled as justified,” said National Assemblyman Lee Wan-yeong, according to Korean press reports. “Isn’t that how government authority works in advanced countries?”

“This is really pathetic,” KCTU said in a statement. “We never expected [Park] to have any insight in democracy, but now we are left to wonder if she has any sense of judgement.”

“Our plan to hold the protests remains unchanged, and all responsibilities for events that may take place on Dec. 5 falls on the administration,” said Park Seong-shik, spokesman for the KCTU. “The KCTU has made it clear that (the Dec.5) rally will be a peaceful one unless (the police) block our path with bus barricades and water cannons.”

Defiance of the police ban on the 5 December protest comes on the heels of a banishment of another protest planned by the Korean Peasant League. The KPL had given notice of a plan to hold a rally drawing some 10,000 participants near City Hall in Jung-gu, central Seoul to police, who shot it down Saturday. The KPL plans to carry out its protest in defiance of the ban as well.

South Korean lawmakers ratified a free-trade agreement with China on 1 December and the KCTU plans to protest this action as well as the same issues it had in November. □To increase pressure on the government, the KCTU says it will launch a general strike of its 680,000 members if the National Assembly moves to pass the aforementioned reforms.

**It would seem that Park Geun-hye is simply taking after her father, who vowed to crush protests against his government, “even if it costs 30,000 lives.”**

# Greece beco

By Theodora Polenta

**Since late November, Idomeni, on the border between Greece and Macedonia, has become a real hell for thousands of refugees. The decision by the Republic of Macedonia on 19 November to close its borders to all refugees except those from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan has left thousands trapped.**

Almost all the NGOs who were active at Idomeni have left, due to fear for their physical integrity, leaving refugees without even a bottle of water. The “humanitarian” government of Syriza-Anel is absent as regards humanitarian aid and relief to the refugees but present with the iron heel of the riot police.

Women, men and children live literally in the mud, and burn whatever they can find in order to warm themselves; children are sleeping next to trash between the makeshift tents that have been erected by the refugees themselves in the fields around the camp.

Some Iranians have begun a hunger strike and sewn up their mouths. A 22 year old Moroccan refugee was electrocuted when he tried to climb on the roof of an abandoned wagon in the railway station and touched power lines. His body was taken to the hospital of Kilkis by other refugees, who marched, weeping, with the dead body along the border line.

While the corpse of the Moroccan refugee was still on the rails, Greece’s immigration Minister Yiannis Mouzalas said in parliament: “Idomeni will be cleared. The government will find a solution and this solution obviously will not be a walk in the woods by carefree school children. It will be a difficult solution for our government, and I believe for all political parties, since nobody wants to use domestic violence”.

## SCHENGEN

**The EU leaders’ threat used to be that they would push Greece out of the eurozone.**

Now, using the threat of Greece being expelled from the EU’s Schengen area (within which there are no passport checks at internal borders), EU leaders have demanded that the Greek government hand over the “protection and control of its borders” to the EU’s notorious border-protection force Frontex.

Dimitris Avramopoulos, the Greek EU commissioner for migration, “urged” the Greek government to take stringent measures to control “refugee flows” by 17 December, date of the next EU summit.

Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico said that Greece has no place in the Schengen zone since it was unable to guard its borders. Guy Verhofstadt, leader of the Liberal group in the European Parliament, likened the Greek border to “Swiss cheese with multiple holes”.

The EU leaders are pressing the Greek government to act upon the commitments it has made at previous EU summits



# omes Fortress Europe frontline



**Migrants demonstrate on the Greek-Macedonian border**

for the creation of five “hotspots” for the registration of refugees (one has already been created in Lesbos) and of camps or detention centres, and to halt the movement of immigrants to other EU countries.

Essentially, they are demanding from the Greek government an aggressive policy of preventing refugees and migrants arriving in our country. In fact, of letting the modern “sans papiers” drown themselves when attempting to cross the Aegean Sea on plastic boats!

For the majority of Greeks, the “threat” of temporary or permanent exit of Greece from the Schengen Area has no particular significance. The working-class majority cannot afford holidays in other EU countries, and anyway the only effect will be that to travel in another EU country we will be need a passport. In any case, Britain and Ireland are already outside the Schengen zone.

What is politically important is the realisation by the Greek people that despite (or because of) our government’s subjugation to the whims of the eurozone leaders, Greece’s position within the Eurozone and within the EU framework is far from secure.

Again to the fore is the German plan for a “two-speed Europe”, which was explicitly concretised by German finance minister Schäuble’s proposal for a “temporary” exit of Greece from the eurozone. Among the dominant EU states, the idea is gaining momentum that European integration in its present form is on its last legs and only a reactionary split into “core” and “periphery” can rescue it.

Meanwhile, despite Syriza’s humanitarian proclamations, the government of Syriza-Anel is being forced by “our EU partners” to act as the border-guard of Fortress Europe

against uprooted refugees and immigrants.

I like the “free movement” offered by Schengen. So I want the free movement of people to be applied to everyone and everywhere. To be enjoyed not as a “privilege” but as a right for all. If it comes to it, we would rather spend a few hours more in the airports together with our brothers from Africa and Asia than become accomplices in the transformation of the Aegean into a water cemetery.

## EU

**At a 29 November meeting the EU and Turkey agreed to implement the Joint Action Plan which “will bring order to migration flows and help to curb illegal immigration”.**

The agreement provides for cooperation between the two sides with regard to “immigrants who are not in need of international protection”: Turkey will need to capture and deport them.

The EU will pay Turkey €3 billion, will speed up Turkey’s application for EU membership, and will abolish visas for entry of Turkish citizens into the EU. These are the rewards promised to Turkey in order to act as a watchdog and restrict the flows of migrants and refugees to Europe.

24 hours after closing the deal Turkish authorities arrested more than 1,300 refugees on the Turkish coast, at the places where they usually depart for Greece, and took them by bus to a hotspot/recording centre. It was found that the overwhelmingly majority of them were Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis whom even the EU recognises as refugees.

In any case, it is clear that people who cannot live neither in their own country nor in Turkey will find at the end a way to leave illegally, and the Turkish operations will be just an

additional obstacle on their journeys which are already long and dangerous.

To the desperate and persecuted people who are simply looking for a new land to start their lives from scratch, the Greek government does not give even a bottle of water. To force migrants to return by train to Athens, they abandon them without food at the mercy of the riot police. After the government has completed what Mouzalas referred to as “clearing”, the border will be handed over to Frontex.

The most critical demand for the Greek anti-racist movement remains that Syriza government keep its pre-election promise to demolish the fence at Ebros, on the border with Turkey.

In Greece the Left, alongside the trade unions, the anti-war and anti-racist movement must strongly demand no Greek involvement or complicity in the EU leaders’ war against refugees.

Refugees and immigrants are welcome!

No screening centres, detention centres, or “hot spots” in Greece.

Unilateral withdrawal of Greece from the Dublin II Treaty.

Provision to welcome refugees.

Integration of the refugees and immigrants into an international working class movement that is challenging the dominant meta-narratives of austerity and hermetically sealed borders.

**Greek myths always tell us something, sometimes by their reversal. The meditation, self-reflection and skepticism of old Daedalus is good, but in moments like now, we need the confidence and impudence of the young Icarus.**



# Not so welcome after all

By Anja Hertz

**Reading the Anglophone liberal press over the last months, one could gain the impression that Germany is a beacon of hope for all the refugees to whom the rest of Europe is to an ever-increasing degree becoming a hostile fortress.**

Indeed, compared to the situation in most European states Germany has let in a large number of refugees and the images of applauding volunteers welcoming them at various train stations seemed to redeem the fears of the return of the ugly chauvinist German that had emerged at the height of the negotiations with Greece in the summer. But there is a nasty flipside to the German “welcome culture” that has received decidedly less media coverage internationally.

This year, there have been more than 700 attacks on refugee shelters — 300 percent more than the whole previous year — as well as countless assaults on individuals. Particularly common have been arson attacks on as yet unoccupied buildings that are earmarked as refugee shelters, and there have also been attacks on places where people already live.

According to the Federal Criminal Police Office, the majority of perpetrators arrested are from the immediate neighbourhood and more than 65 percent have no previous record of right-wing activities. Yet arrests have been made in only five percent of these attacks and there have been as yet no convictions. This growing hostility towards refugees echoes the atmosphere in the early 90s when there were, on top of the “ordinary” levels of violence in the streets, the pogroms of Hoyerswerda and Rostock-Lichtenhagen and a number of arson attacks that killed several people.

While the attacks are happening all over the country, Saxony in the east has become a focal point with the highest number of attacks per capita. Its capital, Dresden — by the way the economic success story of east Germany, which contradicts simplifying explanations of racist violence as the domain of those who have lost out economically — is the heart of the right-wing populist Pegida (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamification of the West) movement.

## MIDDLE

**Pegida has spread to various mostly east German cities. Commentators have stressed that the increasingly aggressive rhetoric of Pegida and its other regional branches — speakers droning on about a Muslim invasion and the impending loss of German identity — is directly feeding into rising levels of racist violence.**

The movement has existed for more than a year now and has, especially in its early days, been very successful at presenting itself as “concerned citizens”. An academic survey of the people attending the weekly demonstrations has contributed to this perception by stressing the large proportion of middle class people with degrees among the movement.

The interpretation is the result of a “theory of extremism” that is popular among conservative German social scientists. The premise is that there is a middle of society that is largely identical with the sociological middle class and is demarcated from “extremist” fringes on the left and on the right, with the latter generally presumed to be poor and uneducated. In this world-view, racist attitudes can by definition only come from the margins of society. Therefore a movement like Pegida cannot be racist but must have legitimate concerns.

Because of Germany’s past, accusing someone of racism is



Aftermath of arson attack on temporary accommodation for refugees in Rottenburg

a serious matter. Paradoxically, this results in racism largely being considered the domain of baseball bat-wielding neo Nazis. That racism is a structural issue and can have a “friendly” middle-class face is inconceivable to many. This is why authorities often operate with terms like “xenophobia”, suggesting a regrettable but common human sentiment instead. Racist violence is often trivialised.

This was overt in connection with the right-wing terrorist network NSU (National Socialist Underground) that exposed itself in 2011 when two of its members committed suicide after a failed bank robbery. Over the course of a decade, they had killed nine people with a Turkish/Greek background and a German police woman. At the time the press wrote about “the döner killers”. Even though these murders were partly linked by the weapon that had been used, police refused to seriously consider the possibility of a racist motivation, suspected the families of the victims and focused on non-existent links to organised crime.

In the aftermath of the uncovering of the network, branches of Germany’s internal secret services destroyed numerous files but were still unable to suppress the fact that most of the collaborators of the three main suspects had been paid informers of various services who, in turn, had obstructed police investigations because they were afraid of losing their sources. The true extent of the network and their racist crimes is unclear as of yet, a second parliamentary commission has just taken up an enquiry and there are separate enquiry commissions in a number of federal states.

This structural racism among the authorities, the unwillingness to recognise racist acts for what they are, is also to be found today. In a number of cases when arrests were made after an arson attack, police announced that there had been no racist background, but that people had acted out of fear or personal frustration. Unless there is a pamphlet left behind or a swastika daubed on a wall, there is a fair chance that a racist attack will be classified as “mere hooliganism”. This has allowed many municipalities to downplay the extent to which neo-Nazi activities are a serious problem in their region.

This trivializing of racism has also underpinned the official reactions to Pegida and the recent wave of racist violence.

Politicians from the social-democratic SPD to the conservative CDU/CSU and even individuals from the supposedly socialist *Die Linke* voiced empathy with the concerned citizens and were eager to stress their willingness to engage in a dialogue with those who feel overburdened by the number of refugees in Germany (while, of course, making clear that violence is no solution). Since gallows bearing the names of Merkel and deputy chancellor Gabriel (SPD) were carried around at Pegida marches, this enthusiasm for dialogue on part of the established parties has largely subsided. Those parties are now regularly being addressed in Nazi jargon as “traitors to the people”.

Nonetheless mainstream politicians are still eager not to lose any more votes to the new right-wing populist party AfD (Alternative for Germany) that has benefitted from the upsurge in anti-refugee sentiment, and presents itself as the parliamentary wing of Pegida. Politicians from all major parties have voiced concerns over the “tidal wave” of refugees coming to Germany and conjured up a scenario of strained local authorities that can no longer deal with the logistical challenges of housing so many people. But apart from a few places, such as Berlin where inflexible bureaucrats have indeed created a humanitarian nightmare, with families camping out in the cold for weeks, there has been no logistical chaos. This is mostly due to the work of countless volunteers.

Nevertheless, these statements have contributed to sentiments that refugees are a burden and a threat, so that the right-wing attackers feel that they are executing the will of the people.

## LAW

**As in 1992 when the relatively generous right to asylum of the Federal Republic was replaced with a considerably stricter one, the actions of the right-wing mob have had legal consequences for the refugees.**

In the last few years, autonomous refugee protests had led to a loosening of some of the harshest aspects of asylum law, such as non-cash benefits or compulsory residence that forbade asylum seekers to leave the administrative district where their application was being processed. Those restrictions have now been re-introduced, along with a number of other measures that are supposed to make Germany a less attractive destination and affect the refugees’ legal security.

Back in the 90s, the introduction of the harsh new laws led to a gradual petering out of arson attacks, but the new draconian measures of the last few months have had no similar effect. Also, the phenomenon is too widespread to be met with organised resistance. Attacks often happen in rural areas where there are few anti-fascists.

**Since 1990, NGOs have counted at least 180 murders committed by neo-Nazis. Racist violence has become a continuous but under-reported background noise of normal German life. Unfortunately everything suggests that there will be more to come.**

## Far right gains in France

By Gemma Short

**The Front National (FN) has won 27-30% of the vote in the first round of France’s regional elections.**

This vote share is the highest the far-right party has ever gained, and they came top of the poll in half of the regions. The FN has never before had control of any region, in the 2010 regional elections they got 11% of the national vote.

The FN did particularly well in the northern region of Nord-Pas-de-Calais-Picardie, where Marine le Pen is standing. This is a working-class area and traditionally a strong-

hold for the left; it includes Calais. Le Pen made the issue of the “jungle” migrant camp a large part of her campaign.

FN also did well in richer regions. Le Pen’s niece Marion Maréchal-Le Pen topped polls with 40% in the southern region of Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur, which includes some of the richest towns in France. Maréchal-Le Pen has said Muslims cannot be French unless they “yield to the manners and way of life from France’s Christian traditions”.

**The final result will be decided in a second vote on 13 December, after we go to press. The FN are however on course for a large victory and this should alarm anti-racists across Europe.**



# Syria, US-UK bombing, and the Kurdish struggle

**Kurdish campaign activists Choulia Mola and Alican Ercol spoke to Pete Radcliff**

**PR:** Some prominent Kurdish Peoples' Protection Unit (YPG) fighters from the UK seem to have welcomed the bombing because of US air strikes supporting the battle for Kobane. How has the UK joining bombing raids in Syria been taken more widely by Kurdish organisations and people in the UK?

**CH & AE:** We need to be very careful. Bombs, no matter how smart they are, cannot distinguish between civilians and jihadists. Bombs have resulted in creating many more enemies than those they have eliminated. We learned this lesson from Iraq and Afghanistan.

The bombings that took place in Kobane were successful because they were directed by the Kurdish forces fighting on the ground. If we want our strikes against Daesh to be successful we need to push governments to ask for directions from the YPG who have been fighting Daesh on the ground for year and have the experience.

The Kurds fear that if this does not happen, we will experience civilian deaths and fail to defeat Daesh.

A simple "no to war" is not a realistic approach either. It seems to us that this is a left over from the 1968 left and war in Vietnam. But we are in 2015 and this is Syria. We need to update the discussion and educate the public as well. Left interventions on the Syrian issue need to be synchronized with the democratic and secular revolutionaries of the region.

**PR:** What is your assessment of the protests against the bombings and the argument in the British parliament?

**CH & AE:** Until now the Syrian issue has been seen through a limited political perspective. Public discussions have not been wide enough to encompass all the different aspects of the topic. So now people cannot relate to it from a broader perspective. There is an anti-war atmosphere, but the topic needs to be opened up, so that people can see clearly all the issues. What we find very interesting is that even though Kurds are the only force fighting Daesh, they are not given the importance they should have. Corbyn did support Kurdish rights in the parliament, which made us happy, but we need to push him even further.

**PR:** Can you tell us anything about the Syria Democratic Forces that were recently formed? Do they share the secular and democratic aims of the YPG or are they only a very temporary alliance for limited military gains? How numerous are they?

**CH & AE:** Numbers in the SDF should reach 40,000. They are an alliance of a variety of ethnic groups from the region: Assyrians, Kurds, Arabs, Armenians etc. Thirteen military groups are included in the SDF forces and including YPG/YPJ of course. The hegemonic role is played by YPG, which is the backbone of SDF. Due to the particularities of the time and region, there was a need for such an organisation. The organisations that have signed the declaration of the SDF are generally secular and progressive forces. It is difficult to say whether it is temporary or not as the terrain can change very fast. But as long as there is a need for it, the organisation will continue to exist.

**PR:** How would you assess non-Daesh military and non-YPG forces that are not under Assad's control, the much-spoken-of 70,000?

**CH & AE:** First of all the 70,000 are not a homogeneous group. Within the 70,000 there are lots of opportunist organisations that have supported different kinds of policies. There are Islamic extremist groups, groups that are not secular and are pragmatic about their policies. They have sometimes supported Daesh and sometimes have been against it. The groups are also sometimes opposing each other. Relying on them [for a campaign against Daesh] is not very realistic.

On 8 December the Saudi regime is co-ordinating a conference in Riyadh, supposedly to "unify the opposition" against Assad. It has the sponsorship of Turkey. The PYD and YPG have not been invited to this conference. The UK and US appear to be backing Saudi Arabia in co-ordinating ground forces in Syria and organising the Syrian opposition. How seriously is the initiative taken by the HDP or PYD?

The Riyadh conference is a response, or a counter-balance to the Vienna talks, where Russia and Assad were the effec-



**Kurdish activists try to raise awareness of the complexity of political issues in the Middle East**

tive players. When Russia became more actively involved in Syria, Assad's position strengthened. The anti-Assad forces looked for an opportunity to re-organise against Assad. The Riyadh conference is basically that.

It is impossible for the secular and democratic PYD, which advocates a totally different governance system for the Middle East, to participate in a conference that is designed to re-organise all the backward forces against Assad. We need to make clear that the anti-Assad militaries are a plethora of jihadist groups. The US/UK will observe the conference and its results and will act accordingly. PYD will definitely observe and assess the events, but its involvement with these non-democratic groups is impossible.

**PR:** How are the HDP or other Kurdish organisations responding to the very large Syrian refugee communities in Turkey?

**CH & AE:** HDP is very strong in the councils in southern Turkey, i.e. North Kurdistan. These regions are receiving many refugees on a daily basis. HDP attempts to respond and provide for the refugees in the region. Not only local councils, but the Kurdish people that live in the region welcome the Kurdish, Arab and Assyrian refugees that arrive there from other regions of the Middle East. In Turkey and internationally, a variety of campaigns are trying to raise awareness and help for the refugees and are run by the Kurds. The policy of PYD and that of HDP is to welcome all the peoples living in that area. And anybody and any group that wants to discuss with them is more than welcome. Sometimes longer or shorter relations might develop, however the primary collaborator is the SDF.

**PR:** There are other Syrian organisations in the UK under the Syria Solidarity Movement umbrella which opposed the UK launching of bombings in Daesh-held territories, mainly because for them the battle against Assad is more important. Does the movement in support of Rojava Kurds have any contact with them?

**CH & AE:** We have not heard of any solid contact between the Kurdish communities and the Syria Solidarity Movement. It is obvious that they are seeking a solution to the Syrian issue but this does mean that they have a programme. Their declaration is abstract and we are having difficulties determining what their stance is on the Syrian issue. The Syria Solidarity Movement is clearly anti-Assad but we are not sure how they position themselves against the other jihadist groups.

**PR:** Syria Solidarity call for a no-fly zone, largely to defend Syrians from the aerial bombardments of Assad which are backed by Russia. They argue that this will allow Syrian civil society to reorganise. However none of the big powers seem interested in it. What do Kurdish organisations think of this idea?

**CH & AE:** Even though it sounds very pleasing, it is unrealistic. A while ago Turkey also proposed a no-fly zone above a region inhabited by Turkmens next to the Turkish borders. Turkey's proposition was promoted as something impossible

to realise by the international forces.

A no-fly zone also does not ensure that the population is safe. What would happen with attacks carried out on the ground? To create a no-fly zone, military forces are needed to ensure overall peace in the region. Wars are now fought through proxy forces and a no-fly zone does not really affect all the different groups fighting on the ground on behalf of foreign interests. For Syria, rather than trapping ourselves in unrealistic and ineffective propositions, we need a serious program. What the Kurds are doing in the Middle East is exactly this: they are building what they want, instead of just calling for it.

**PR:** Do you have any further comments on how the struggle for democracy can be fought for across Syria?

**CH & AE:** The basic problem in the Middle East is that lines between the different religious, political and economic interests are very well defined. The different social groups find it easy to express anger against groups that different to theirs. When borders change in Middle East and old dictators fall, when a new Middle East is born, what needs to be ensured is that all the different ethnic groups can live together. That is what we need to help the progressive forces in the Middle East to realise.

The cantons in Rojava, as a self-governing system that consolidates the different ethnicities and geographies of the region, is the realisation of such a plan. And it has succeeded to a great extent. And this kind of politics is exactly what the Middle Eastern hegemonies and capital wanted to poison in the Arab Spring. They wanted to prohibit these new forms of organisation that were bound to start appearing. The oppressive forces were looking (and still are) for a means to resurrect themselves and change the direction of the insurrections in the Middle East. They needed to create the grounds for the capitalist relations to flourish and of course keep them, or their like in power.

The Kurds decided not to chose between the dictatorships of the past and the new imperialist relations, but have proposed a third way. This includes the unity of the ethnic groups of the Middle East in the most secular and democratic manner. The proletarian forces of the world should support the Kurds in their struggle.

## SNP slur about Syrian bombing vote

**According to the Scottish National Party, Labour is backing bombing in Syria. SNP MP John Nicolson summed up this view when he created the hashtag: "Labour, Conservatives and Lib Dems #BombingTogether." Nicolson claimed bombing was supported by most of the Shadow Cabinet. Not true. It was also opposed by 152 Labour MPs who were backing Labour Party policy against bombing. Why do the SNP lie? Article here: <http://bit.ly/1Tyg462>**



## Whose revolution?



**What kind of revolution takes place in the *Hunger Games* trilogy? The answer is not particularly clear, because the films are marked by a notable absence of politics.**

As Daisy Thomas writes in her review (*Solidarity* 386), the key themes sweeping through the film are the powerless vs. the powerful, and the mobilising force that comes from hope, but at no point do the uprising dissidents express any kind of political vision for a world after President Snow.

There is a class component to the revolution. Katniss Everdeen, the protagonist, comes from the poorest of the districts of Panem, District 12, where people regularly die of poverty and starvation, and ghastly, onerous workplaces and conditions. Districts are divided broadly along lines of race, and industry, with Katniss coming from Panem's white mining community. The districts' impoverished workers take up arms and march on the wealthy, decadent Capitol. But rather than identifying their exploitation as systemic, the characters in the film understand the source of their exploitation to be President Snow himself.

This is in part why the final two films were so unsatisfying. *The Hunger Games*, the first film, takes place 74 years after the Hunger Games were created. They were established as a means of disciplining the district residents following a mass revolt, headed by District 13. This background adds to a convincing dystopia, which is bleak precisely because the grip that the Capitol has over the districts has history. Snow, who is by all means a despot and the architect of much misery and death, is continuing a legacy rooted in generations of class conflict.

### VISION

**It is frustrating then, that the *Mockingjay* films are so flat. Rather than articulating a political vision, the district residents seem to blindly follow the *Mockingjay*, their symbol of hope.**

Katniss in turn, reluctant to be cast the hero, consistently refuses to stand shoulder to shoulder with her fellow revolutionaries, instead going off alone to kill Snow and satisfy her own desire for revenge.

The story does take an exciting turn towards the end, however (spoiler alert). President Coin, leader of the rebellious District 13, becomes interim leader following the revolution. Katniss is disturbed to discover that the bombing of hundreds of children, from both the Capitol and the districts, was devised by Coin and, it is hinted, Katniss' lover from District 12, Gale. Upon taking power, Coin declares that elections will be suspended in the post-revolutionary period, and that a new Hunger Games, pitting the bourgeoisie against one another, should take place in celebration.

Katniss, once again a lone hero, publicly assassinates Coin, and as a result, free and open elections take place. A happy ending.

So then, what kind of revolution takes place in the *Hunger Games* trilogy? Not a socialist revolution. Off screen, perhaps, district residents were meeting, discussing, writing great socialist texts. In any case we're not told about it. It is certainly progressive, the working class are fighting for democracy, first and foremost, and against the disciplinary nature of the state, most clearly represented in the "peacekeepers" (state police) and the Hunger Games.

**Ultimately though, it is (unsurprisingly) a revolution acceptable for Hollywood. Despite the history of Panem being steeped in class conflict, class is rarely mentioned and politics is largely absent. The bloody history of Stalinism gets a reference, but it is our hero, Katniss, not the masses, who saves the day.**

Kelly Rogers, South London

## A story that is not told but felt

Dave Kirk reviews *Carol*, in cinemas now.

**In 1952 Patricia Highsmith was so fed up with depictions of gay women in fiction who were either punished or pitied, that she decided to write a novel about love between two women that actually reflected her life as well as the crushing hypocrisy of straight society.**

That novel, *The Price of Salt*, published under a pseudonym went on to be a million seller.

63 years later this novel has been filmed, and yet this is no mere filmed novel. Too often Hollywood provides solid, stagey but cinematically inert period movies that clutter up the acting award categories at the Oscars. This transcends its source to be a truly beautiful, moving and daring movie.

Rooney Mara's Therese is a shop worker in 1950s New York. She meets Carol played by Cate Blanchett, who is buying a train set for her daughter. Therese is soon invited to dinner with Carol. Their relationship gradually develops through subtle performances and lush and arresting direction.

As Carol's marriage fails, so does Therese's relationship with her boyfriend. Neither Carol or Therese are willing or able to perform the roles assigned to women in McCarthyite America. They fall in love, but scarcely have the words to express this.

Roles start to be reversed as Therese gets a job as a press photographer and Carol is caught up in a battle over custody of her child with her wounded and hurt ex-husband Harge. Harge's tragedy is he loves Carol even though he knows he can't make her happy.

The brilliance of Todd Haynes's direction is that the story of Carol and Therese isn't told, it's felt. Every detail, from the clothes the characters wear, to how they smoke cigarettes, to every deep focus or abstracted out-of-focus shot is telling us something about the characters relationship and about the society they live in and the subjectivity of the camera itself.

Haynes's rose to prominence as part of the "New Queer



Cinema" movement. He has always been interested in how subversive critiques of gender, race and class were smuggled into some of the lush and on the surface conventional movies of the 40s and 50s. In the case of his movie *Far From Heaven* the influence was the melodramas of Douglas Sirk. In *Carol*'s case it's the classic British movie *Brief Encounter*.

This movie has struggled to get to the screen. The script was first written 19 years ago by Phyllis Nagy. No producer or star would touch it until Cate Blanchett herself took up getting the film made. Finally in 2011 Todd Haynes heard of the movie and asked to direct. Even then it took four more years to get the film funded and made.

Even now the movie poster managed to use a shot of Carol dancing with her husband rather than a shot with Therese, presumably thinking even today the suggestion that it's a movie about lesbians would put off a mass audience.

**It's likely Hollywood will garland *Carol* with Oscars and pat itself on its back for being associated with such a socially progressive and artistically brilliant movie, and then go back to ensuring movies like *Carol* hardly ever get made.**

## Daesh is not just "blowback"

The Left  
By Gemma Short



**The response from much of the left to parliament's vote to commence air strikes in Syria has been characterised less by their usual collapse into the "anti-imperialism" of supporting your enemy's enemy, than by an absence of commentary.**

It is good that most of the left have shifted from an (at best) implicit backing of reactionary regimes as long as they clash with UK-US imperialism, or feel that such a position is no longer popular. Yet in most of the left, what has replaced this is either a lack of commentary on Daesh, or at worst an ill-explained "blowback" argument.

*Socialist Worker* editorialises that "the same politicians lecturing us on the need to 'defeat Isis' are responsible for the destruction of Iraq and the group's rise. They set the region ablaze — now they're dousing it with fuel." Whilst the British and American state carry a large responsibility for the bloodbath that Iraq became, and the bombing campaigns being led by the UK, US and France now will not stop Daesh and may possibly make them stronger, painting the situation in the whole of the Middle East as simply the result of western imperialism ignores independent political tendencies. Social forces of the Middle East are not just simply passive pieces in the west's game.

Protests against UK intervention were dominated by generic "no more wars" peace-nik politics. This is understandable from left-minded people as a reaction to the UK's role in Iraq and Afghanistan, but actually the UK is not *starting* a war. A war is already going on in Syria, and has been for four years. Hundreds of thousands have died, four million refugees have fled to other countries, eight million are internally displaced. That is the result of the Assad regime, Daesh and other Islamist groups — not UK imperialism.

An article by political commentator and author Matt Carr posted on the Stop the War website has caused outrage with its apparently favourable equation of fighters joining Daesh



with the International Brigades. The political comparison of choice, after Hilary Benn described UK-US airstrikes as in the spirit of the International Brigades, has been much analysed. Carr's article states: "Benn does not even seem to realise that the jihadist movement that ultimately spawned Daesh is far closer to the spirit of internationalism and solidarity that drove the International Brigades than Cameron's bombing campaign — except that the international jihad takes the form of solidarity with oppressed Muslims, rather than the working class or the socialist revolution."

Carr is telescoping a large part of 21st century history into one sentence, and as a result makes a pretty ugly and clumsy comparison. He also lumps together all those travelling to the Middle East, to join a variety of groups, in the last 15 years. Most damningly, and making the article sit well with the Stop the War version of the world, he appears to be uncritical of the "international jihad" being about "solidarity with oppressed Muslims". Again this removes from the equation all independent political ideologies, and reduced political Islam to a "blowback" against oppression.

Yet there are some grains of sense in some of his article. His description of "solidarity with oppressed Muslims, rather than the working class or the socialist revolution" is true of much of the left who have, over the last period, abandoned a class analysis of Muslim-majority countries.

**The left's failure to reach out to Muslim-background people in the UK on a class basis has left a political vacuum has been filled by the religious right.**



## Win at Alfreton school

By Liam Conway

**Teachers at Alfreton Grange school have won a huge victory in their dispute over the imposition of a nine period day.**

Teachers at the Alfreton Grange Arts College campaigned for six weeks, and struck for eight days. When the NUT leadership engages in empty talk of social movement trade unionism, they should be looking at Alfreton Grange for a living example!

The strikers demanded that the college should return to a five period day, the standard across most secondary schools. The academy trust brought in to "raise standards", Torch Gateway, tried to tough it out. At the picket line managers would pass the strikers in their cars at speeds well beyond the speed limit, occasionally coming close to knocking NUT members and officials over.

But the tough stance did not work. Following the increasing involvement of parents, students, local Labour councillors and other trade unionists, the picket lines began to grow. A public meeting called by Derbyshire NUT attracted 200 parents who expressed their full support for teachers.

Soon the students themselves were added weight to the pressure on Torch, a company used to getting its own way at schools in neighbouring Nottinghamshire. Year 11 students organised a questionnaire to gauge the views of students about the nine period day. The survey showed that over 90% opposed the new timetable and believed it was damaging, not improving, their education.

### COMPLETE

**Eventually Torch were forced into talks at ACAS, the result of which will mean a return to the standard 5 period day at the school. This represents a complete victory for the strikers.**

The Alfreton Grange dispute shows that without strike action to highlight the issues, community involvement is unlikely to materialise. Vague talk of "social movement trade unionism" without industrial action yields little. The strikers' active involvement in the running of their dispute, was the key to victory. Now the Union must spread this kind of action to many other schools and build for national action against the epidemic of bullying management in our schools.

The union must also go beyond the protest strikes. At Alfreton Grange members were prepared to take extended strike action over a short six week period. The union made it clear to the bosses that we were in it to win it.

**It is this model of social movement trade unionism that needs adopting nationally, and not just by the NUT.**

## Free school teachers strike

**"I don't think the media understand how much it takes to make teachers strike", said a picket outside "Tech City College", a free school in Islington, London.**

The teachers are striking on 8, 9, 15, 16, and 17 December, demanding a limit on observations and fairer performance management.

"A lot of these students are being denied a chance to get to university by the way this school is run", said a picket. "The management don't know what they're doing".

"Tech City" is part of a 12-school chain, and has its AS students spending a day a week on a "Leadership Course" instead of academic study. The chain's boss, Steve Kenning, paid himself £230,000 and his wife £158,000 in 2013-4, the last year for which we have figures.

**The majority of the school's teachers will quit at Christmas, but those who will stay on are determined to continue the battle for a decent school.**

- Messages of support to [nut@islingonteachers.org.uk](mailto:nut@islingonteachers.org.uk).
- Read more: [bit.ly/techcitystrike](http://bit.ly/techcitystrike)

**RMT members have elected Portsmouth dock worker Sean Hoyle as the union's next National President. Workers' Liberty members in RMT supported Sean, believing him to be the candidate most able to defend members' interests, uphold the union's democracy, and hold its officers to account.**

# Unison full-timers caught cheating

By a Unison member

**As the ballot closed for Unison's general secretary election on 4 December, 23 minutes of audio recording were leaked revealing a covert campaign by Unison's full-time staff to favour incumbent Dave Prentis in clear breach of Unison rules.**

Left-wing challenger John Burgess has called for an independent enquiry led by respected labour movement representatives and for any result that secures Prentis' victory to be declared null and void.

Burgess is right. Although this mess is probably illegal, the labour movement should hold its own to account and mete out its own justice.

This leaked file is a secret recording of a briefing by then London Regional Organiser, who instructs her colleagues in minute detail on how to campaign for a "Dave", using Unison resources and on Unison time. During the recording we hear the contempt our regional staff have for lay members and our union's

democracy.

The briefing, held on 21 October 2015 at 2pm (when the full-timers were working on union time) starts with the organiser thanking her colleagues for their hard work in securing over 50 branch nominations for "Dave". She tells us "Dave is very, very pleased and he's relayed that to me personally". Does this mean Dave Prentis himself was in on the conspiracy?

We hear that bundles of "Vote Dave Prentis" propaganda will be stored in a fellow Regional Organiser's office. ROs should put aside 3-4 days to canvass "friendly" branches and lay activists to distribute these materials.

### TIED UP

**Branches that "nominated the opposition" should be "tied up in other activism" during the election period.**

And repeatedly the full timer instructs her colleagues not to get caught.

Any casual observer of Unison's London Region will know there is something rotten in this section of the union. The militant

Tres Cosas campaigners at the University of London were originally organised in Unison. They broke and formed an independent union under the banner of the IWGB after their victory in the branch elections was declared null and void. When they protested at Unison's offices, the bureaucrats called the riot cops.

Save Lewisham Hospital campaigners will remember the hostility of the local Unison branch and regional organisers to the campaign.

This issue is not simply an abstract question of union democracy. The regional officials implicated in this recording are the same fulltimers who thwart attempts to organise a fight-back against the Tories and bully the activists that do. For the past five years public sector workers have endured an unprecedented assault on our pay, terms and conditions. There has been an onslaught of privatisation and cuts. Yet Unison has barely organised a protest.

Strikes, protests, and organising workers are hard



**Incumbent Dave Prentis is facing allegations of cheating**

work for union officials. This audio clip demonstrates what many of us have suspected for many years. A large section of the full-time staff see their work as "organising" a few compliant reps whilst creating a hateful, witchhunting, clique atmosphere against the militants, choking off democracy, shutting down attempts to organise.

**With weak leadership few workers agitate for a fight, and so the officials can claim their pets are the true voice of the rank-and-file.**

- Full article: [bit.ly/Unisongate](http://bit.ly/Unisongate)
- Call for an inquiry: [bit.ly/UnisonInquiry](http://bit.ly/UnisonInquiry)

## Fight redundancies in HMRC

By Gerry Noble\*

**HMRC management have announced mass closures to offices throughout the country.**

170 offices are scheduled to close being replaced with only 13 Regional Centres and 4 Specialist Sites by 2020.

These closures will inevitably lead to redundancies for thousands of staff and cause further poverty to many of our already inadequately paid members forced to accept an increase in travel costs. (The short term compensation outweighed by reductions in

Working Tax Credits in most cases)

Local economies will see a devastating effect and communities built upon a long-standing Public Sector presence destroyed.

On 24 November the SNP raised an opposition motion in Parliament which was supported by many Labour MPs. The Tory minister shamelessly accepted the inevitable redundancies and refused to address equality impact concerns.

Unfortunately this opposition motion was lost but of course our campaign continues.

In terms of the response of PCS, we believe it to be

ludicrous for the HMRC Group Executive to continue talks with the employer under their current dispute (Jobs and Staffing) as the employer has clearly demonstrated a refusal to consult in any meaningful way in order to protect the jobs and wellbeing of our members.

My proposal as the Independent Left (Left opposition faction within PCS) voice on the HRMC executive to suspend talks immediately following the announcements with HMRC was denounced as "nonsense" by some!

Ironically, we consider the continuation of talks with

the employer after this shattering closure program was announced to make a nonsense of industrial relations and conference policy and offensive to our members.

**As far as we in Independent Left are concerned, PCS needs to immediately withdraw from talks with the employer and respect the members' mandate to pursue an industrial response relative in scale to the office closure announcements.**

\* PCS HMRC Group Executive Committee and PCS Independent Left

## DLR workers to escalate strikes

By Ollie Moore

**Members of the Rail, Maritime, and Transport workers' union (RMT) on London's Docklands Light Railway will launch a series of escalating strikes from 11 January, as workers step up their fight against casualisation and management bullying.**

RMT has announced an extensive programme of

strikes, including walkouts on various days between 11-14 January, 8-12 February, 7-12 March, and 21 March-2 April.

**The announcement represents a significant break from the common labour movement practice of only announcing one or two days of strikes.**

- Full article: [bit.ly/DLRstrike](http://bit.ly/DLRstrike)

## Sheffield housing workers to strike

**GMB members working for Sheffield council's housing service will strike over changes to terms and conditions after the introduction of a new management scheme, Housing Plus.**

Workers will work to rule from now, leading up to strikes in January.

Workers say the restructuring will result in pay cuts as well as a deskilling and

downgrading of their jobs. The new system has been piloted in areas of the city and workers say it doesn't work for staff or for service users.

**Peter Davies, regional organiser for the GMB said: "not only have the council annihilated the terms and conditions, they are forcing through something which doesn't work."**





## Syria: “Just a few more jets”, but civilians die

By Simon Nelson

**Hours after MPs voted for air strikes in Syria on 2 December, RAF jets carried out their first raids. The strikes are said to have targeted Daesh-controlled oil fields and military installations.**

Russia, which has been bombing in Syria since 30 September, has made strikes in the biggest Daesh-controlled city, Raqqa, which may have killed up to 30 civilians in a single raid. There is little evidence that Russia's targets were well chosen.

The Guardian has quoted a spokesperson for the anti-Assad “Free Syria Army” (which Cameron touts as a coherent and “moderate” anti-Assad force to defeat Daesh) as dismissing the British intervention as “just

a few more jets.”

US, Russian, French, British, and other air strikes may have hit Daesh economic infrastructure, but there is no evidence that they are anywhere near defeating Daesh.

Defeating Daesh requires a force on the ground capable of winning Sunni-Muslim Arabs to fight it actively. The Kurdish forces in northern Syria, which deserve our support for their struggle for their national rights, cannot do this.

An assertive workers' movement in the region could do it, but the US, UK, French, tied into alliances with Turkey and the Gulf States and uneasy cooperation with Russia, cannot. Their bombing raids, designed to show that the governments are “doing something”, will at best help rival Sunni-sectarian

groups against Daesh and may actually help build the base for sectarian Islamism through their inevitable civilian casualties.

Documents recently passed to the Guardian (7 December) show Daesh's plans for its “caliphate”, which stretches across the Syria-Iraq border.

The document begins by stating that, “The state requires an Islamic system of life, a Qur'anic constitution and a system to implement it.”

Right from the start, Daesh banned table football, billiards, and the keeping of pigeons, and much women's clothing too.

The documents suggest that Daesh can get up to \$8m per month in state revenues, making them far less reliant on foreign donations than groups like Al Qaeda and Al-Shabab, though still

poorer than even a small “normal” state.

Taxes generate 23.7% of Daesh income, oil and gas sales 27.7%, and confiscations of banned items, mostly tobacco, 45%.

Of those revenues, Daesh spends 63.5% on soldiers' salaries and military bases, and only 17.7% was used for public services.

Daesh enshrines private property in its rules and “privatises” infrastructure projects.

It tries to control the people it rules by a combination of carrot and stick: a ban on private Wifi, increased check-



397 to 223 MPs voted in favour of Syrian air strikes, a majority of 174.

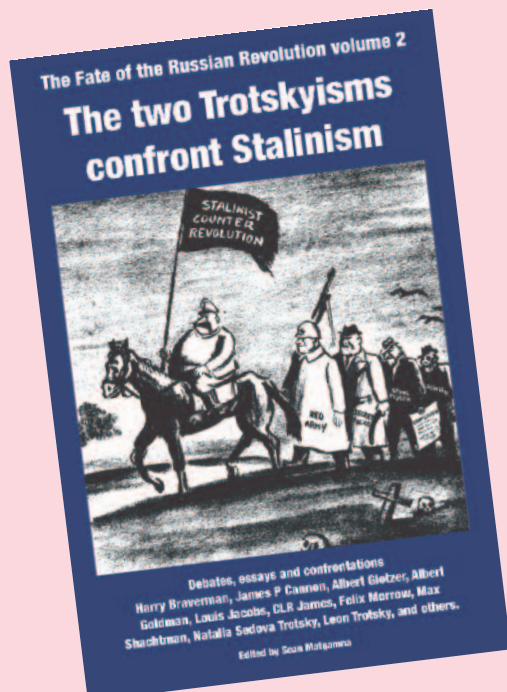
points, and the requirement for those who have been previously associated with “enemies of the caliphate” to register themselves, together with \$100 prizes for excellence in religious studies, and “free passes to an amusement park and its newly

renovated five-star hotel in Mosul”.

- For Workers' Liberty statement on Syria [bit.ly/1ONRzCE](http://bit.ly/1ONRzCE)

- Tubeworker's response to the attacks in Leytonstone: [bit.ly/1YW1wSF](http://bit.ly/1YW1wSF)

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